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UNCLAS SOFIA 000584

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR BU  
SUBJECT: FY09 NADR REQUEST FOR UXO REMEDIATION NEAR SOFIA

REF: A. SECSTATE 88343

¶B. SOFIA 451

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Post greatly appreciates the funding provided in Reftel A to support Bulgarian UXO clean up efforts at Chelopechene Ammo Storage Facility. With these resources, the Bulgarians predict they can complete the clean up of most of the blast site before the end of the year. However, even with this funding, the innermost section of the site (with the highest concentration of UXO), will remain beyond the capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces to remediate. In light of the Defense Minister's request for assistance and based on discussions with the Bulgarian military and State PM/WRA, post requests approximately \$800,000 to \$1.2 million in additional NADR funding in FY 2009 to cover the cost of a hiring a U.S. contractor to complete clean up of the site. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The furor over the 3 JUL 2008 explosions at an ammo storage facility outside Sofia has subsided, but Bulgarian clean up efforts remain severely hampered by lack of essential equipment and supplies. The approximately \$232,000 provided for this purpose under Embassy Sofia's FY 2008 NADR funding will be of great assistance to Bulgarian efforts. In addition to this, and as discussed during PM/WRA Mark Adams's visit to Sofia, post requests additional FY 2009 NADR funds for cleanup of the most difficult portions of the blast site. Hiring a U.S. contractor to complete this work is estimated to cost between \$800,000 and \$1.2 million.

¶3. (U) U.S. contractor assistance with the innermost portion of the site was specifically requested by Defense Minister Tsonev in a 30 JUL 2008 letter. Follow-up inquiries by the Bulgarian MOD indicate the importance the Bulgarians place on this additional assistance. Not only will these funds deepen U.S.-Bulgarian military partnership and generate goodwill from the Defense Minister and the Bulgarian military (who have been hit hard in the press for their handling of the incident), but they would help ensure that site does not pose a public risk or result in a death or injury to inadequately equipped Bulgarian explosive ordinance personnel.

¶4. (U) COMMENT: In addition to the benefits above, post can use the FY09 NADR funds to encourage Bulgaria to use its own resources to address other shared SA/LW destruction priorities, such as elimination of obsolete weapons systems and consolidation of ammo storage facilities. Post will also reinforce its long-standing efforts to persuade Bulgaria to accept U.S. funding to destroy its military stocks of MANPADS.

McEldowney